THE CREDIBILITY OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

ORVILLE E. CRAIN

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The Credibility of the Virgin Birth

By
Orville E. Crain

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE HISTORY OF THE QUESTION . .	5
II.	THE TESTS FOR HISTORICAL CREDIBILITY	16
III.	THE SOURCES FOR THE WITNESSES OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH . . . . . (a). Matthew's Gospel. (b). Luke's Gospel	29
IV.	THE CRITICISM OF THESE SOURCES . 1. Manuscripts. 2. The Versions. 3. Internal Evidence and Originality of the Two Gospels. 4. The Argument of the New Testament Silence.	36
V.	THE AGREEMENT OF THE WITNESSES . (a) The Major Agreements. (b) The Historicity of Related Events. (c) The Genealogies.	51
VI.	THE "INFLUENCE THEORIES." . . . (a) The "Old Testament Influence Theory." (b) The "Jewish Influence Theory." (c) The "Heathen Influence Theory."	59
VII.	THE SECONDARY WITNESSES . . .	71
VIII.	THE WORTH OF THE ITEM TO THE CHURCH	77

I

THE HISTORY OF THE QUESTION

THE opposition directed against the virgin birth of Jesus is almost coextensive with the preaching of the gospel itself. Celsus (178 A. D.) opens his polemic against the Christians by referring to the taunts which the early Jews flung at them, and the first reproach of which he makes capital is that Jesus whom they worship was not born of a virgin but was the son of a nameless father. From that time of hostility, evidenced by the Jews and the vitriolic pen of Celsus, the supernatural conception of Jesus has suffered intermittent criticisms which have varied in degrees of scope and intensity.

In a rough classification, the primary group to deny the claim that Jesus was supernaturally conceived embraces those writers who for the most part were out of sympathy with all forms of "revealed

religion" and denounced the whole body of Christianity in particular. Within this group of radicals might be placed Celsus, Reimarus, Renan, Strauss, Voltaire, Haeckel, and others—men who differed in time, temperament, and to some extent in philosophical aptitude and scholarly attainments, but who commonly agreed in their scathing condemnation of all supernatural claims for Jesus Christ. Their denial of his miraculous conception would, of course, be necessarily incidental to their treatment of his life as a whole.

A second group which denies this item of the Christian creed is a class of scholars who are more or less in sympathy with the practical claims of Christianity. However, a marked tendency to rationalism causes them to uniformly ignore, as much as possible, the miraculous elements of the Scriptures. Whenever these particular features cannot be so evaded, it is the policy of this second group either to cunningly explain away the historicity of supernatural assertions or to invalidate the texts which declare them. It is

possible with this method of "rigor and vigor" to subvert all Scripture to any and all prejudices for personal faith or conduct, and the multiplied and ofttimes grotesque variety of "theories" proposed as solutions of miraculous gospel narratives taxes our sense of faith and intellect more than the acceptance of the scriptural story itself.

Important in this group, and representing this school in their many and divergent theories, it is pertinent to name Paulus, De Wette, Schmiedel, and Keim. Of course others akin to these can be named, and likewise some more modern than they, but there is little new in method or in data that the later writers of this school have produced to date. The writers named cover for the most part the various theories directed against the historical credibility of the virgin birth. Paulus explains it away on the assumption that Jesus' conception was but the result of a self-conscious reaction due to the deception of Mary by her cousin Elisabeth. De Wette dismisses the nativity stories of the Christ-child by assert-

ing that the authors of these claims merely attempted to portray an Oriental symbol. Schmiedel represents the "Influence Theory" group, who assert that the virgin birth records are but the result of "external influence" upon the minds of the early authors of the Gospels that record them. These "Influence Theories" vary with their authors, and severally assert that the thought and story of the miraculous birth is directly traceable to "Old Testament Influence," the "Heathen Influence," and "Jewish Influence." The supporters of these several theories agree only in this—they bitterly condemn the supernatural conception of Jesus, and they as bitterly rail against each other's explanation of the gospel's claim for it. Keim sponsors the group that propose that someone has corrupted the original texts of the Gospels which contain the Nativity chapters, and, if we will critically deal with these texts, the claim for the virgin birth will be easily and scholarly disposed of. Thus runs the line of theories put forth by the group of rationalists of yesterday and to-day. A

perusal of their writings indicates that they surely quarrel with each other in their hypotheses concerning the virgin birth, and only agree in declaring it without foundation of fact.

As a general rule, the early writers who criticized the virgin birth considered it only with the attention equal to that which they bestowed upon the other common items incidental to a "Life of Jesus." Very little importance of an intense or critical sort was given this item apart from the other miraculous events in Jesus' career. However, in the later period of theological criticism the virgin birth of Jesus has, like other features of his life, assumed an enlarged and separate importance. The subject has been deemed so large and engaging that numerous scholars have produced many pamphlets and books to maintain various theses opposing the virgin birth.

There is a third group of scholars who are within the church and accept the evangelical doctrines of the Christian faith, but are opposed to the acceptance of the virgin birth of Jesus. Most of these

writers are sincere in conviction and study. Many of them manifest a deep interest in the Christian faith, and zealously assert their loyalty to the practical claims of the Christian religion. They do contend, however, that the claim for the supernatural conception of Jesus is not supported by any trustworthy evidence. They contend that, whether the miraculous claim be either real or fancied, it makes no essential difference in the person of Jesus or his place as the Christ. They argue that this item of Christian creed makes for no doctrinal contribution or measure of worth to the church. It is their general contention also that the complete cancellation of this article from our Christian creed would do no violence to historic facts or authentic scripture, but, on the other hand, would so purge our gospel that it would make a stronger appeal to the thought of our day.

These repeated attacks upon the virgin birth have from time to time drawn forth its staunch defenders. Beginning with Aristides (136-161), including the Church Fathers, and continuing to Tholuck, these

apologists were ever alert to champion the claim of the supernatural conception of the Christ. Many conservative critics of later date brought all of their abilities of scholarship to the defense of this particular article of their creed. The narrower group of apologists strove not only to maintain the credibility of the virgin birth of Christ, but with an equal zeal they asserted that the doctrines of his incarnation and sinlessness were wholly wrapped up in the contention. These defense theses generally insinuate quite strongly that the opposition directed against the virgin birth is primarily an attempt to undermine the whole traditional conception of the inspiration of Scripture and the divine nature of Jesus Christ. Such writers declare that the denunciation of the virgin birth is but a denunciation of the virgin life of our Lord, and that such assaults are to be countered with scholarly perception and power. Chief among such writers was Professor James Orr, and in his abilities and stand he was no doubt the leader of his peers. Another wing of conservative

scholars, of whom L. M. Sweet is an example, labored to present effective argument for the credibility of the supernatural conception as a fact, but the issue that doctrinal features depended upon it was not forced.

It is difficult to say just to what extent the radical attacks upon the virgin birth have altered the mind of the church concerning it. No doubt it did less in that direction than both liberal and conservative expected. The Christian Church is rather conservative; and conservatism of any sort is difficult to penetrate. Practically the whole Christian Church from its beginning, with but few exceptions, had a common faith in the supernatural conception of its Christ, and always accepted the integrity of the Gospels that declared it. This age-long preponderance of belief, born of gospel record and teaching of the church, was not seriously affected by the critics whose academic theses seldom filtered down to any great portion of believers within the church. However, that portion of the church which was touched, either directly or

indirectly, by the negative theories, was affected in various ways. Without doubt those of liberal tendency found comfort in the negations which explained away the miraculous claim of Jesus' birth by dissolving it as fictitious. Many others, however, who were of simple faith and devout mind suffered the loss of both because of the aspersions cast upon the Gospels and the claim made for their Lord.

It is evident that a great portion of the Christian Church to-day is aware that the question as to the credibility of the virgin birth is one on which there is a decided division of opinion. The so-called Fundamentalist and Modernist controversy has, either consciously or unconsciously, placed the virgin birth in the light of a test case for orthodoxy in the Christian Church. Because this particular item has been so centered upon, multitudes are hearing pronouncements which affirm or deny the ground upon which our faith in the virgin birth may or may not stand. As a matter of fact, many persons who stand outside the circles and communions

where these theological discussions are fiercest are nevertheless so constantly coming in contact with abbreviated remarks and garbled assertions concerning the virgin birth that they know not who to follow nor what to believe.

Do we have any grounds for faith in the virgin birth? Does it matter whether the claim for it be true or not? Is the item of any worth to the church? Shall the Scriptures which allude to it be doubted, and the article of the Creed be omitted or repeated with mental reservations? As a pastor, teacher, and Christian, can I "give a reason for the faith that is in me" about this particular question?

The purpose of these little chapters is to sum up in brief compass a review of the best that has been said on the theme by those who have given the subject exhaustive criticism and study. There is no conscious attempt to contribute argument to either the Fundamentalists or Modernists as such, for the extremists in both groups will disagree with the thesis presented. The sincere

aim is to show that faith in the virgin birth of Christ is not necessarily empty, but that it can be sincerely held by thoughtful minds of to-day.

II

THE TESTS FOR HISTORICAL CREDIBILITY

THE consensus of Christian scholarship provides but two essential and adequate tests whereby to judge the validity of the claim for any reputed miraculous event. The first test is this: Is the alleged miracle worthy of an especial act of God? This point implies that God can and does act in special ways, and that he will be regulated in such activities only by moral occasion, and never be limited by impotency.

The rationalists who stand outside the pale of theistic philosophy will, of course, protest that the reference to a "special act of God" implies an unwarranted assumption. These thinkers, however, can scarcely be counted as Christian scholars, especially from the standpoint of their philosophic attitude. Most of

these men, if they see God at all, seldom conceive him as transcending the world of nature, and never see him revealing himself in the life and history of man. It is, more or less, from this basis of philosophy that many of the critics of the virgin birth have written, and, consciously or unconsciously, all other legitimate tests for the case have ofttimes been subverted to the rationalistic bias.

The Christian thinker believes in the free working personality of God. He has made the world for his divine purpose, and, both to reveal and achieve that purpose, he is considered to be morally free to act whenever and wherever he may so choose. He is expected to operate in what we in our experience contrast as ordinary and extraordinary modes of action—in the world of nature, in the realm of life, and on the plane of human history —to the end that his high purpose be accomplished.

The claim that especial activities of God in these ways picture him as being in conflict with the so-called "natural law" does not disturb our thought. "Natural

law" is but the embodiment of the world order as we may have happened to observe it, and its content varies more or less with human progress and scientific study. Thus the study of the world-order has placed some of the "supernatural phenomena" of the past into the category of mere "natural law" of to-day. However, it is not to be feared that the progressive scientific study of the world order will, in time, dissolve all of the supernatural elements of the Christian religion into the natural order. The very contrary is true.

Scientists are now showing us that even in the world of "natural law" there are certain common laws, which if dealt with in a fashion that nature of itself does not do, can be made to produce "supernatural" results that in a certain manner are analogous to the virgin birth and resurrection of our Lord. But the miraculous features related to Jesus are not the product of "natural law," nor are they contrary to or limited by it; they are the result of God personally relating these laws to each other. The supernaturalism really consists in the power of the

Divine *to control* the laws of his natural world to secure *his aims.*

As an illustration to clarify the foregoing paragraphs, let us consider the "parthenogenetic theory" which some writers have employed to support the claim for the virgin birth of Christ. This theory merely means that there is such a fact as "pure virgin production" of life. For many years the idea that ovum could be developed without paternal fertilization was not considered within the realm of "natural law," and any assertion to the contrary was treated with contempt. However, we know to-day that this idea has a proven basis in fact. In the natural order, generations of aphids are produced independent of male fertilization, as are certain species of crustaceans.

This law is likewise subject to artificial manipulation. Scientists, by certain degrees of light and shade, succeeded in growing silk worms that produced caterpillars without any male contact. Jacques Loeb, by a certain parthenogenetic method, produced frogs that lived and grew normally for over one year.

The reference to this law in nature and the further results made possible by personal manipulations of it suggest to our mind that the content of so-called "natural law" is not static; and that in particular there are in the *natural* world certain laws that make for virgin birth, and, under *personal* control, these laws can cause virgin birth in higher forms of life than does nature, of itself, perform. Another point is this: when Loeb, for instance, produced the frogs without the male factors being involved as nature always involved them, we are not to suppose that Loeb did anything in the manner of "suspending" or "canceling" natural law; he only permitted some laws to supersede and counteract others. His act was comparatively "supernatural," not that he worked contrary to natural law, but that he employed a certain relation of natural laws beyond the confines of *common* experience. If, by the human will and action, one force can be made to supersede another, and one law to counteract another, so that an effect, if not miraculous, at least essentially is a

change in nature and through it, how much more is the God of all nature both free and able to do the same in the realization of his great purpose in the higher realms of life!

It is not only congenial to believe that the supernatural conception of Jesus could be possible with God, but it is likewise affirmed that such an especial act would be worthy of him as well. Some critics assert that it places God in a sorry light to be conceived of as working a miracle on such a physical plane in order to secure such a spiritual end. The divine worth of the miracle is not minimized by this stricture. The theory of divine immanence declares that between the spiritual realm and the physical plane there is no impassable gulf fixed. In his transcendent prerogatives God is supposed to use physical instruments to accomplish his ends. This does not imply a necessary limitation in mode of action, but it does assume that God does not disdain to direct physical forms and functions to the purpose of spiritual goals.

The incarnation of Jesus is a miracle

somewhere on a physical plane. The very uniqueness of Jesus in the peculiar unity of body and spirit cannot be explained by any other method. Most all critics admit that Jesus was at least a historical character. None except a few Gnostics ever questioned that he possessed the physical organization which we call the body, subject like ours to the same laws. But Jesus had more than body; in union with it he had those psychical qualities of mind and spirit which we call his personality. He had these to a remarkable degree, as the Scriptures represent and most students concede. In alluding to Jesus we, then, must bear in mind that the totality of his person is involved.

The essential feature of the incarnation of Jesus is that God supremely touches the plane of physical life with divine power. Some contend that the nature of Jesus is essentially the same as ours in point of substance, but differs from ours in the degree of achievement. Others hold the view that the nature of Jesus was essentially different from ours in that we are but human and he was divine. No

matter how these rival schools might quarrel about the particular nature of Jesus, they more or less agree in naming him as the outstanding Person of the ages. Based upon this uniform and practical testimony, it is conceivable that if Jesus alone, in relation to all the rest of humanity, occupies such a preeminence of place, he must likewise stand in some proportionate unique relation to God. Whether we call Jesus human or divine does not cancel this practical degree of the preeminence of his person or his power, for the one involves the other.

Science rightly asserts that mankind is the masterpiece of God's creative power. In our terms of thinking we assume that God put forth special power when he endowed mankind with physical excellence, mental superiority, and spiritual aspirations. But this same mankind, with its keen mental and spiritual perception, acclaims Jesus to be the Master-Man. To the extent at least to which Jesus is so far above and beyond the human race can we reason that he is supernatural to men as such, and that he

is the highest incarnation of the divine power.

All of us thus practically confess that Jesus was the "Word that became flesh, and dwelt among us." We may disagree as to whether "The Word was God" or "merely came from God," but we must agree that in some time and manner the divine empowering of Jesus transpired. By denying the supernatural conception to have been the mode we can postpone the time of the incarnation, but we cannot escape the fact that such an act as the incarnation was both worthy of God and was accomplished by working on the physical plane. With this in mind, the divine activation of the initial cell of the future human body of Jesus does not represent God as working on any lower physical plane than if he should have likewise empowered the millioned-celled body of Jesus in postnatal days.

We can accept this miracle as worthy of God also because it serves to a spiritual end. The virgin birth does furnish many minds with a basis upon which to interpret the doctrines of Jesus' incarnation

and sinlessness. To some others it contributes nothing to these doctrines. But the miracle has value beyond its possibility as a conditioning agency for these doctrines. It serves as an especial event which inaugurates a supernatural life of a unique Lord who heralded a new kingdom and led men into it. Any secondary manner in which the virgin birth might serve to such a spiritual end is worthy of an especial act of God. We feel that this reputed miracle meets the first test imposed upon it for historical credibility; the event is possible with the God of revelation; it is not impugned upon the ground that it is a miracle worked upon the physical plane, and it proceeds in the direction of securing a spiritual purpose.

The second test to which any alleged miracle is subjected is that it be able to present adequate and unimpeachable witnesses for its claim. This is a crucial test under which many assertions fail and are dismissed from all further sober consideration. Christian philosophy and an allowance for a spiritual worth are favorable toward the virgin birth, but who and

what are the witnesses? The only primary witnesses which we possess are the written narratives found in the opening Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The virtue of written records as witnesses for a historic event are ofttimes in question, but they, and some secondary effects which the alleged event might reflect in associated or continued events, are about all of the evidence that we have for history of any sort. Historical events can happen independently of any records concerning them, and many writings might chronicle events as historical when they never occurred, but it is also possible that many events do occur in history and that written record is made of them.

It is in the last division that we place the claim for the virgin birth. The Scriptures declare it in a definite fashion. To many minds this evidence of itself is sufficient. But a sober and critical evaluation of any biblical event must be submitted to careful scrutiny in order that the worth of the text may be proven. Even accepted passages are to be interpreted as only true to the purposes for

which they were written, and not always do they carry substantial evidence as historical facts. This sometimes applies to the commonplace assertions; much more must it be required for all alleged supernatural events. However, any allusion to the Bible involves Jesus Christ. He caused the better portion of it to be written, and it is the marvelous power of his divine life that makes all of the Scripture live. Some one has said, "The Old Testament is Jesus foretold; the Gospels are Jesus told of; the remaining New Testament is Jesus retold." Some may question that the Old Testament writers had the real Messianic insight into Jesus' rôle, but none can deny that Jesus was the Person about whom all the New Testament centered.

This outstanding record which so centers in Jesus and provides us with our chief knowledge of his unparalleled life and his subsequent influence upon the world, tells us with the purport of historical fact that Jesus was supernaturally conceived and born of the Virgin Mary. Much study, research, and pa-

tience have been devoted to the texts which make this declaration concerning our Lord, but the item is incapable of absolute historical proof or disproof. All that scholarship can do is to present evidence either for or against the grounds upon which our faith in the item might rest.

III

THE SOURCES FOR THE WITNESSES OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

A. *Matthew's Gospel.* The early church ascribed the authorship of the first Gospel to Matthew, a man who, upon becoming a disciple of Jesus, assumed "Matthew" as a new name (Luke 5. 20). The controversy as to whether we have an original copy of his Gospel in the Greek manuscripts or merely a translation from an earlier Aramaic document has more or less inclined to the conclusion that Matthew wrote the Gospel ascribed to him in Greek, and probably used some collection of sayings called the "Logia" as a basis for some of his Gospel. This seems to be the opinion of the early Church Fathers, and Papias and Eusebius are directly quoted as asserting that Matthew was the author of this Gospel which we place first

in the New Testament canon. The date of the Gospel is somewhat uncertain; Harnack, after patient research, places it as early as 70 A. D., while Peake makes it approximate the year 95 A. D. The bulk of scholarship considers the Gospel to have been produced about 75 A. D.

Internal evidence of the Gospel indicates that the author was a Christian Jew, but not a Judaizer. The narrative is not written for the delight of authorship; it is not a polemic, but an earnest attempt to justify Jesus Christ to the Jews as their expected Messiah. Matthew was an immediate disciple of Jesus; the Gospel reveals that he stood very close to the events which he describes and that he possessed data derived from good sources. In all probability Mark's Gospel, the Logia, and trustworthy traditions were available to and used by the author when he wrote his narrative.

B. *Luke's Gospel.* No literary criticism has ever been directed against the Lukan origin of the third Gospel. It is true that some portions of the Gospel have been repudiated as "tendency writ-

ings" from the Pauline side, but these theories are vague and in no manner compromise the Lukan authorship. Likewise the "recast theory" of Luke is not regarded with favor by any scholars of note. Harnack, with good evidence, places the date of this Gospel about 60 A. D., while Peake contends that the year 95 A. D. is a more favorable date.

Luke is the most historic and artistic of all the Gospels. The prelude to his narrative sets forth the reason that he had for writing it. He acknowledges that others have written concerning the life and teachings of Jesus, and that he desires to do so in an orderly fashion that Theophilus might know of a *certainty* all the things believed by the Christians (including himself) concerning the Christ. This prelude would indicate the historian's characteristics. Luke starts with the beginning of Jesus' life, and proceeds to give an orderly and coherent account of it. He bases his right to trustworthiness upon the ground that he has the words of eyewitnesses and that he himself had a perfect understanding of the

various events of Jesus' life from the beginning. That Luke is historically trustworthy is admitted by able scholars, and is proven in detail by the eminent research student, Professor Sir William Ramsay.[1]

There are several items of importance relative to the virgin birth to be found in the foregoing remarks. First, the early date in which the authors wrote their Gospels would provide an ample opportunity to know and investigate all matters at first hand. Secondly, the day in which these narratives were written was a period of fierce debate and criticism concerning the *common claims* of Christianity. Hence the authors would of necessity exercise a caution in weighing every item of Jesus' life that they touched upon, for they knew that any claim, false or fancied on their part, would be readily seized upon by competing creeds and colder critics to mock the Christian faith.

Nor does the time or spirit of the date

[1] *Was Jesus Born At Bethlehem?* Also read a later study, *Bearings of Recent Discoveries on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, Chapters xi and xviii-xxiii inclusive.

of these Gospels' writing readily favor any conditions whereby Jewish influence or pagan analogy could have been worked into the story of Jesus' life. The Christian Church was despised by the Jews, and the most liberal of them who were in the Christian way at all were in the sect of the Ebionites, and they differed primarily with the true Christian body on the very question of the supernatural conception of Jesus. Even the pagan critics had, before this time, scathingly denounced the mesalliances of their gods, and made such stories a subject for jesting. We further know that the church at this time sought with scrupulous care to avoid all Judaizing tendencies and heathen taint, both in thought and practice.

As to each specific Gospel something can be said. Matthew seeks to take the objectionable events in Jesus' life and justify them to the "hope of the Jews." He attempts to explain the suffering Messiah, and show the worth of the hated cross by appeals to Jewish prophecy and subsequent events. We do not believe

that Matthew would then create a story so objectionable to the Jews as the virgin birth and thus assume an extra burden in his endeavor to win what was, even without this item, a hostile position. Matthew is only seeking, in his Nativity chapters, to do there what he attempts to do in *all* of his narrative—to vindicate the Messianic claims of Jesus to the Jews. Because of this uniform aim in all of his Gospel throughout we are not so easily led to believe that the infancy chapters are merely some anonymous or fictitious prelude tacked to Matthew's Gospel. They are *in accordance* with the *whole* object of the author's purpose.

Luke, as the author of the third Gospel, also has a relative importance to the story of the virgin birth beyond all of the trustworthiness that the prelude to his narrative would imply (Luke 1. 1, 4). Luke was a physician (Col. 4. 14). To what extent he was a man of science might be questioned, but it would be sober to say that he, at least in line with claims for miracles wrought upon the human body, would not easily be deceived himself,

much less attempt to deceive others. Luke was also Paul's traveling companion (2 Tim. 4. 11; Philem. 24). We cannot expect that these two zealous disciples would pursue their long and hazardous missionary journeys without conversing upon the outstanding characteristics of their Master's life. Many scholars assert that Luke was influenced by Paul, and that the color of his Gospel is as much modified by the great apostle as was Mark's Gospel the product of Peter's public preaching. The Epistles of Paul make no allusion to the birth of Jesus at all, and on this ground many affirm that Paul did not accept the item. However, if Luke's narrative is a "Pauline gospel," it would appear that Paul probably did accept the virgin birth as Luke records it, but that Paul had no occasion to refer to it in his letters. In view of these several facts, we feel that the Nativity chapters of Matthew and Luke can be accepted as authentic in the main issue involved.

IV

CRITICISM OF THESE SOURCES

THE opposition to the claim for the virgin birth of Jesus passes by the foregoing facts with comparative ease by denying the credibility of the first and third Gospels in the witness they bring. A first group does not question the integrity of the Nativity texts as such but casts reflection upon the intelligence and the sincerity of the two authors, who, we are told, lived in a superstitious age, and were not critical toward the complex and legendary atmosphere of their day. The weight of this stricture will be considered in a later discussion.

A second group attacks the credibility upon the original integrity of the Nativity texts themselves. They hold that the infancy chapters of Matthew and Luke were not part of the original Gospels in which they are found, but that they are fanciful preludes invented and attached

to the primary Gospels by later writers. If either of these two types of contention is true, then our witnesses to the historical credibility of the supernatural conception are impeached. But we feel that these authors were both sincere, intelligent, and accurate in the main concerning the birth of Jesus, and that their Nativity chapters were integral parts of their primary Gospels. To maintain this conviction, let us look to the sources of these Gospels, which are the manuscripts and the Versions.

1. *Manuscripts.* First, in the manuscripts of these Gospels which we have available to us, all of them, with but two exceptions, contain the Nativity chapters of Matthew and Luke. Marcion issued an edition of Luke about 140 A. D. and omitted the first two chapters. But this omission by Marcion was prompted for certain reasons. His Gnostic tendency did not tolerate the belief that Jesus was born at all, much less of a virgin. Such opposition would indicate that we could not expect to find a virgin birth in Marcion's corrupted edition of Luke.

The Jewish wing of the Ebionitic Christians was scarcely considered as within the church because that body challenged the divinity of Christ, and contended for his pure humanity. To them the claim of a supernatural conception smacked too much of divine incarnation, hence their manuscript of Matthew deletes the first two chapters. Outside of these two manuscripts, which were corrupted no doubt for dogmatic reasons, all of the manuscripts of Matthew and Luke contain the Nativity chapters. Ignatius (117) stood close to the days of the earliest editions of these Gospels, and he refers to their story of the virgin birth without any trace of denial.

2. *The Versions.* Of *all* the versions now extant only two of them contain evidence which might at first appear to be unfavorable to the virgin birth. The first of these is a Syriac Version which reads, "Jacob begat Joseph; Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary, the virgin, begat Jesus who is called the Christ." Concerning this text several things might be said. The first thing is this: such a state-

ment may have been due to the fact that repetitions of the word "begat" were used so extensively in former verses that the writer unconsciously used it here also. Again, the verb "begat" in this connection is possible of a feminine translation, and thus would state that the "begat" was an action ascribed to Mary. Some scholars affirm that the whole passage in question is due to some interpolation by some Ebionitic author. Whether these several explanations of the verse in this version are valid or not, we do not think that this Syriac Version by its single sentence offsets the weight of the many other universally accepted versions that declare the virgin birth of Jesus.

The second version which omits the supernatural conception is the dubious "Gospel of the Hebrews." This version need not demand much consideration, for the whole manuscript of it shows so much mutilation that it is difficult to accept most of its parts as authentic.

It has been conclusively shown that all of the earliest manuscripts and versions of Matthew and Luke contain the infancy

chapters as they appear in our translations of to-day. The only manuscripts and versions that fail to do this are those manuscripts and versions that seem to be corrupted either by Ebionitic or Gnostic tendencies. Even these manuscripts and versions are few in number and cannot be reasonably employed to counteract the evidence which the many and uniformly accepted manuscripts and versions present for the claim of Jesus' supernatural conception.

3. *Internal Evidence and Originality of the Two Gospels.* While some admit that the Nativity portions of Matthew and Luke are parts of the oldest manuscripts and versions, they argue that the Nativity chapters of Matthew and Luke are not nevertheless original with the remaining portions of the primary documents with which they are found. It is claimed that there is a lack of unity between Matthew's first two chapters and those that follow. It is also contended that there is an apparent difference between the Nativity chapters of Luke and his subsequent chapters.

In answer to this point we can say that there are apparent breaks between many of the chapters in all of the synoptic Gospels. Their brief survey and rapid movement makes them almost incapable of even progress, but the unity thus modified is in no manner a compromise of their original continuity. The closest scrutiny of the infancy chapters in Matthew and Luke reveals that they compare very favorably with the remainder of their Gospels. Both Plummer and Harnack say that whoever was the author of Luke (3 through 24) and of the Acts was also the author of Luke (1 and 2).

Likewise, evidence for the unity of Matthew is quite strong. Matthew has a fondness for the phrase, "that it might be fulfilled," and he uses this uniformly throughout his Gospel as a prelude to some prophetic utterance of the Old Testament. This earmark of Matthew (3 through 28) likewise is employed five times in Matthew (1 and 2). The peculiar Greek words and phrases so common to the Nativity chapters, are also common to the remainder of the Gospel. These

internal evidences plainly deny that there is a double authorship in either of these Gospels.

The attempts to dismiss the claim for the virgin birth in Luke by eliminating certain verses that assert it have been made by Beyschlag, Harnack, and others. They say that by omitting Luke (1. 34, 35) the claim of the virgin birth of Jesus will vanish from Luke. By this method any and all claims could easily be dismissed. Such an operation would be contrary to the original story as found in all the early manuscripts and versions. Even if these verses were omitted, enough of Luke would remain to declare the virgin birth. After a fair examination of all the evidence it appears that the infancy portions of Matthew and Luke possess an original and textual integrity in keeping with the body of their whole Gospels.

4. *The Argument of the "New Testament Silence."* The attempt to impugn the virgin birth is made on the score that only Matthew and Luke record it and that the remaining authors of the New Testament never allude to it in the faint-

est fashion. This argument has but slight weight. Matthew and Luke are the only authors who give us any account of Jesus' early life; all other New Testament writers write their Gospels or Epistles within certain confines which do not reach into the infancy of Jesus. Hence they would not, except by mere accident, have reason to refer to his birth at all. Various scriptures have been written to serve various purposes (2 Tim. 3. 16) and what might *not appear* in the Epistles in no manner would cancel the truth and worth of what is found in the Gospels.

A. The Logia. This is probably the oldest record of Jesus' sayings, but just what it was or contained is doubtful. Harnack's reconstruction of this document is only a tentative proposition, and he himself asserts, "that the Logia is not a biographical narrative, but is essentially colloquial" in content. Hence the questionable construction of the Logia, in view of its very purpose, would exclude a reference to the birth of Jesus.

B. Much is made of the silence of Mark

because it is supposed to be the oldest Gospel that we have. It is both true that Mark is our oldest Gospel and that it does not mention the birth of Jesus. But the silence can be accounted for. First, Mark's prelude, "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," implies that no attempt was made to begin with an early biography of Jesus, but to start a record of Jesus' preaching at the beginning of his ministry. In the second place, if Mark's Gospel was based upon the public preaching of Peter, as most scholars agree it was, then we would expect no record of the virgin birth. Peter would not need to allude to it for doctrinal purposes, and any unnecessary reference to it before an already hostile people would possibly prejudice them against the reception of the evangelist's bigger message concerning the Christ. Mark does refer to Jesus as "the Son of God." The implication of his incarnation would not, as such, be unfavorable to the possibility of his supernatural conception.

That Mark has internal evidence con-

trary to the virgin birth is not a serious charge. In Mark 6. 3 the people are represented as asking, "Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary?" etc. This reference does not imply the *paternity* of Joseph, but the *maternity* of Mary. It might be asked why Mark does not portray the people as inquiring, "Is not this *the son of Joseph?*" In ordinary cases the authors generally refer to persons in family descent upon the paternal side, but this is an exception. Whether this very idea can be made to allow Mark favoring the virgin origin of Jesus or not, the fact remains that nothing in the text can be used to *deny it.* Nothing in Mark can be quoted as directly affirming or denying the virgin birth of Jesus.

C. John is silent upon this item of Jesus' life also. His silence is probably due more to lack of occasion for the mention of this fact than his ignorance of it. Like Mark, John begins his Gospel with the ministry of Jesus. "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" indicates that the divine incarnation occurred sometime and somewhere. It may be that

John's philosophical turn of mind gave no thought to the details of mode and manner in this matter. Again, John wrote his Gospel *after* Matthew and Luke were current, and John might have not deemed it important to repeat what was already common to the two existing Gospels and the tradition of the church. In John there *is no contradiction* of the virgin birth.

The claim that John 1. 13 offsets some ground for the credibility of Jesus' supernatural conception is not profound. If the verb "ἐγεννήθησαν" is given a singular ending, the inference would assert the supernatural conception of Jesus. But the better reading is prompted by the context to make the verb plural. In this sense the verse states that those who received Jesus became sons of God, and were so born as sons, not by the will of blood or flesh, but by the will of God. The passage has no bearing upon the birth of Christ at all.

John 6. 42 and 7. 5 are also strained as testimonials to oppose the virgin birth. The first reference pictures the Jews' sur-

prise at Jesus' claims of divine relation with God, and they inquire, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph?" In dealing with this text let us bear in mind that John is merely quoting what the *Jews thought,* and not his personal convictions. In all probability the Jews did not know of Jesus' supernatural conception. We are told that "Mary pondered these things in her heart," and with reason we may infer that a certain delicacy would prevent a promiscuous publication of the miracle to others.

The text in John 7. 5 indicates that "Jesus' brethren did not believe on him." Just how this text denies the miraculous conception of Jesus we do not know until we are informed that Jesus' brethren would have believed on him if they had known of his origin being so unique. The whole context, however, shows that this unbelief was more traceable to a dogmatic opposition to Jesus' Messianic claim than to an ignorance of his birth. Jesus did not make certain revelations in word or deed at this time because he felt that his time had not yet come for them (John

7. 8). It may be that some restraint of this sort was also the policy of the mother. If, in view of what has been said, the opposition still desires to use the unbelief of Jesus' brethren as an argument against his virgin birth, we can use John 2. 3, 5 to show that the mother's faith must have rested upon her knowledge of the unique origin of her Son. Even the brethren of Jesus did believe on him later (Acts 1. 1-14).

D. From the silence of Paul on this item nothing detrimental can be drawn. One thing central to the mind and preaching of Paul was the resurrection of Jesus. This would also dominate his Epistles to an extensive degree. He must have known of the supernatural conception because he was in company with Luke. Paul wrote his Epistles about 53-61 A. D. If the virgin birth was a *heresy* creeping into the church at this time, Paul must have known of it, and would most surely have denounced it as he did some of the other Jewish and heathen items that were threatening the church in his day. Yet Paul does not make any reference to the

virgin birth, much less does he condemn it, although he must have known that it was an article of acceptance by the Christians. We do not feel that the brief time which elapsed between the last Epistles of Paul and the Gospels of Matthew and Luke was ample enough for the incorporation of false stories of Jesus' miraculous conception unless some one would have challenged the item.

Such passages as Rom. 1. 3 and 8. 3 are manipulated to militate against the supernatural conception. Galatians 4. 4 is also enlisted for the same purpose. All of these texts are essentially written by Paul to show the *purpose* of Christ's advent into the world. None of them expressly or incidentally warrant a denial of Jesus' virgin birth.

So far we have discovered that the only Gospels which are biographical of Jesus' life prior to his baptism are Matthew and Luke, and these two Gospels declare the virgin birth. That these Nativity chapters are original portions of the primary documents is proven by all of the earliest manuscripts and versions

that have not been mutilated either by the Gnostic or the Ebionite schools. The Gospels are early and apostolic. Their internal evidence forbids the criticism of any double authorship, later interpolation, and composite origin.

V

THE AGREEMENT OF THE WITNESSES

THE charge is preferred against the Gospels of Matthew and Luke that they are not self-consistent and mutually disagree with each other. It must be admitted that it is difficult to make a harmony between the Synoptics on any event in Jesus' life. Of necessity this is so. The writers wrote what they deemed important data, but not in a uniform way. No two men who are eye-witnesses to an event would, because of their individuality, stress the same points in the same manner. We would not expect a perfect agreement between the birth stories in Matthew and Luke. Their minor differences in the Nativity stories prove very favorable to the fundamental element in it. If both of the narratives agreed in detail, we could readily assert that there might have been a mutual conspiracy in

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recording the supernatural conception. If we were too charitable to prefer that charge against the authors, we might infer that the similarity of the stories was but a duplication of the first author by the second. This theory would weaken the testimony of two witnesses by throwing all of the claim for proof upon the validity of the first. In either case the evidence of the miraculous birth would be harmed thereby.

A. *The Major Agreements.* Full admission is made to the fact that Matthew and Luke show an absolute independence of each other in the composition of their Nativity chapters. The differences are so marked; yet these differences cannot be logically seized upon to impugn the central truth which they both declare. Independence in statement does not imply contradiction in fact. Although the Gospels of Matthew and Luke differ, they in a remarkable way supplement each other. This has been clearly shown by Professor James Orr.[1] He reveals that the discrep-

[1] *The Virgin Birth*, pp. 36-37. Reprinted by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

ancies are but in the minor details of their birth stories, and that there are major agreements in both Gospels to the fundamental fact of the divine birth. Following are the mutual points of agreement which Orr discovered:

1. Jesus was born in last days of Herod —Matt. 2. 1–Luke 1. 5.

2. Conceived by the Holy Ghost—Matt. 1. 18–Luke 1. 35.

3. His mother was a virgin—Matt. 1. 18–Luke 1. 35.

4. She was *betrothed* to Joseph—Matt. 1. 18–Luke 1. 27 and 34.

5. Jesus was born at Bethlehem—Matt. 2. 1–Luke 2. 4-6.

6. Joseph of the house and lineage of David—Matt. 1. 6 and 20–Luke 1. 27; 2. 4.

7. Called "Jesus" by divine direction—Matt. 1. 21–Luke 1. 31.

8. Declared to be a Saviour—Matt. 1. 21–Luke 2. 11.

9. Joseph knew beforehand of Mary's condition and the cause—Matt. 1. 18-20–Luke 2. 5.

10. Joseph took Mary and responsibility for the Child—Matt. 1. 20, 24, 25–Luke 2. 5.

11. Annunciation and birth followed by signs—Matt. 1. 20–Luke 1. 27-28.

12. After the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary dwell in Nazareth—Matt. 2. 23–Luke 2. 39.

Such are the common and fundamental facts in which Professor Orr finds Matthew and Luke in mutual accord. It is also noticeable that when Matthew introduces subordinate details that Luke omits, or *vice versa*, no serious injury is done to the essential harmony of the two Gospels. They are independent and yet they are complementary.

B. *The Historicity of Related Events.* The historicity of the events incidentally mentioned in the Nativity stories has been questioned with the intent to place the main affirmation of the virgin birth in a weaker position. For instance, many critics doubted the fact of any enrollment having been made under Cyrenius as Luke records (Luke 2. 2). The only evidence for this was a debated passage in Josephus. This reflection caused Sir William Ramsay to devote much study to the historicity of events in relation to Jesus' birth, and under the caption, *Was*

Jesus Born in Bethlehem? he produces effective material to show that Luke is a very trustworthy historian. Zumpt and Holtzman find the cruelty of Herod, the astronomical phenomena, and the flight to and return from Egypt to be features favorably supported by historical probability.[2]

C. *The Genealogies.* Passing from these matters, we are called upon to give some account of the genealogies which appear in Matthew and Luke. The opposition contends that these genealogies contradict each other, and by so much they are not trustworthy. It is further alleged that if we do accept them, they will then deny the virgin birth. With the exception of Professor Charles, all scholars, even Lobstein, admit the genealogies to be original with the two Gospels, although Lobstein thinks that the lists of the genealogies existed in earlier documents. We must admit that the genealogies are proper portions of the Nativity chapters; that they do present

[2] Edersheim, in *Life and Times of Jesus*, vol. i, chap. viii, presents evidence which favors the historicity of these related events.

some difficulty in the way of explaining them, but we do not feel that the claim for the virgin birth stands or falls with the solution of them.

We do not feel that the Gospel authors saw any contradictions in the genealogies. If the genealogies in Matthew taught plainly that Jesus was the son of Joseph, why did he employ them at all? Matthew could not thus save the claim for the virgin birth of Jesus by merely inserting the last sentence of Matt. 1. 16 if he intended to make his genealogy merely put Jesus in the way of *natural descent* through Joseph. We do not believe, either, that Luke would make a recital of the genealogy on Mary's side and merely insert the phrase, "as was supposed" (Luke 3. 23), to guard his claim that the birth of Jesus was *not natural.* Both Matthew and Luke would have possessed some sense equal to ours. If they felt that the genealogies were contrary to the statements they made concerning Jesus' miraculous birth, they would not have included them in their Gospels; or else, having included them, they would omit

reference to the unique birth of Jesus. The best answer of scholars is that these genealogies were included, not primarily to claim the line of Jesus' natural descent, but to imply some *legal* and *regal* aspects of Jesus.

Both evangelists make their genealogies those of Joseph in form, yet they only agree in having one name in common—the name of Matthat in Luke 3. 24 and Matt. 1. 15. Matthew, with a Jewish turn, makes his genealogy descendant from Abraham through David and Solomon, while the broader-minded Luke makes his genealogy ascendant through Nathan and back to Adam. We are to bear in mind that Matthew writes to present and prove the Messianic claims of Jesus to the Jews. He therefore writes his genealogy from the standpoint of Joseph to show that the legal rights of Davidic sonship would be resident in Jesus. The idea of throne descent would also be involved in such a genealogy and would add the regal as well as the legal aspect to Jesus.

It is evident that Luke writes his intro-

ductory chapters from the side of Mary. Liberal and democratic as he was, he would have no Jewish concern to attempt anything other than a *direct descent* of Jesus. It is held by some scholars, and that with tangible evidence, that Luke's genealogy, while in form that of Joseph, is in reality one of Mary. It is suggested that Mary and Joseph were tribally related; this was the tradition of the early church and is supported by Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and others. That both genealogies of Matthew and Luke touch on one name, and that just two generations before Joseph and Mary, would allow the warrant that the authors endeavored to show that from the *legal* side of Joseph and the *maternal* side of Mary Jesus had the rights of Jewish sonship and succession to the Davidic throne. In view of these matters, it is plausible to believe, that while the genealogies differ in *form,* yet both are essentially true in *fact.* We think that the strength of this explanation of the genealogies is at least sufficient to ward off any criticism that the critics might draw from them.

VI

THE "INFLUENCE THEORIES"

In an earlier chapter it was intimated that certain groups of the opposition did not give much attention to the credibility of the texts of the Nativity chapters of Matthew and Luke, because these texts were considered to be due merely to the play of some "influence" upon the writers rather than reports of a fact true to history. These "influence" theories are more or less common in principle as to the explanation of why the supernatural conception of Jesus is incorporated in Matthew and Luke, but the theories differ in detail with various writers.

A. *The Old Testament Influence Theory.* "The influence of Old Testament prophecy" will be the first of these theories to be hastily reviewed. This theory asserts that the disciples thought Jesus' life was unique and so were forced to assign to him a supernatural biography.

No material was so fruitful for such an eager enterprise as the rich analogies and prophecy of the Old Testament. Hence to make Jesus supremely great the Gospel authors sought out the heroes and prophecies of a supernatural trend in the Old Testament and cast the details of Jesus' life into the miraculous molds thus made for him.

Using Matthew as an example, the theory proceeds as follows: Matthew is acquainted with the Old Testament, and by it he thinks that he can magnify Jesus. In Isa. 7. 14 there is a verse which states that "a virgin shall be with child," etc. Another accommodating verse is known to be in Micah 5. 2, which refers to "Bethlehem not being the least, for out of her shall come a Saviour." Matthew is acquainted with these passages, and for the sake of illustration he also knows of Jer. 31. 15 and Hos. 11. 1, wherein reference is made to "Rachael weeping for her children," and God "calling his son out of Egypt." Other passages might be alluded to but these are sufficient to show the theory under review.

Now, we are to suppose that no one really knew of the early life of Jesus at all. If anyone did know of his early years, then Matthew could not have asserted miraculous events concerning him. So none are supposed to know much about Jesus until he was some thirty years of age and began the wonderful public ministry of healing and teaching. The tremendous workings of divine power by Jesus begat such an admiration and wonder concerning him in Matthew that he decided Jesus was surely the Jewish Messiah, and as such he *must have* actually filled all of the Messianic predictions. Hence Jesus must have been born of a virgin; he was unique and prophecy favored it. He ought to have been born at Bethlehem; so it is made the place of Jesus' birth. Prophecy also said, "Out of Egypt I called my son"; so Matthew takes the child Jesus to Egypt so he can be called back again. The cause for such a pilgrimage can be based upon the passage relative to "Rachael weeping for her children," and so Herod is made to massacre the innocents at Bethlehem.

Such a theory has its absurdities on the surface. If such a method was the procedure of Matthew in framing even a fancied biography of Jesus' birth and childhood, why would he choose such difficult passages to tally with the events and conditions of the times? Or, if he desired Jesus to fulfill the old Messianic prophecies of the Jews, why did he not take passages from their Scriptures that were more congenial to their thinking? It is significant that he always takes the events that were repugnant to the Jewish mind, and seemed to them to be irreconcilable with "the One that should come to redeem Israel." If Matthew was not authentic in his Nativity chapters, he ran the double danger of perverting history that could be investigated, and would have further driven the Jews from an acceptable hearing.

Again, it might be asked, if there were no unique events in Jesus' life—why would Matthew consider Jesus to have claim at all coincident with his view that Jesus was the Messiah? We do not nor cannot conceive of the early Christians

exercising an unlimited faith in the Christ without likewise having some knowledge of peculiar facts of his life. It would seem better to say that the outstanding facts in Jesus' career begat a virile faith in him rather than to suppose that an unaccounted for faith created a fictitious biography of him. The *knowledge* of certain facts pertaining to Jesus preceded the faith that named him the Messiah. Nor does it appear possible that such Old Testament passages, wrenched from their contexts, could present such a framework upon which to hang events that flaunted historical fact at every turn. The early Christians themselves would have considered such a story as utterly empty, and the critics of that day would have made a target out of the history falsely involved.

We affirm that Matthew did know the Jewish Scriptures. He also recognized that the devout Jew treasured the law and the prophets. He felt that whatever he could support by the one and prove by the other would receive some possible consideration from the Jews. Matthew

knew that Jesus was born of a virgin at Bethlehem. He did know that Herod sought to slay the child, and that Joseph fled to Egypt to escape Herod's edict. But the Jews were hostile to a virgin birth as such. They did not expect anything great of Bethlehem. For that matter, the Jews did not anticipate the meaning of the cross and other events which were related to the real meaning of Messiahship. Now, Matthew sought to win the Jews to a favorable consideration of the unique, and seemingly repugnant, features in Jesus' life. Thus, with a knowledge of Jesus' life, he turns to whatever prophecies he can discover in the Old Testament, and seeks to prove by them (not create, according to them) the real Messianic nature of Jesus. He does this in order to convince the Jews of the truth that Jesus is revealed in their own Scriptures.

Whether Matthew's exegesis is sometimes strained in his particular use of the Old Testament prophecies is not the issue just here and now; the sober facts seem to indicate that Matthew used prophecy

to free the Jews from the contempt they held for the virgin birth rather than make it a mold into which he cast a fancied origin of Jesus. This theory of the "Influence of Prophecy" is in principle contended for by Harnack and Lobstein, but is critically opposed by scholars like Unsener, Soltau, and Cheyne, who, of course, deny the fact of the virgin birth, but ascribe the stories of it to other "influences."

B. *The Jewish Influence Theory.* "The Jewish Influence Theory" need not detain us long. It suggests that the peculiar power and personality of Jesus led his Jewish disciples, in order to solve his nature, to make Jesus parallel, if not exceed, the miraculous characters of the Old Testament. These worthies were at times "overshadowed by the Spirit," and often their birth was associated with divine intervention of some sort. All that Jesus does is similar in manner but greater in degree than the Old Testament heroes, therefore Jesus must be the "Son of God" in a manner that none of them were—he must have been supernaturally

conceived. The idea of such a conception, so this theory says, was not an idea incompatible with Jewish thinking, and it was seized upon to explain Jesus.

This theory is condemned by Cheyne and Schmiedel, who with others say that it is empty. The Jewish mind never did hold to a *strictly* virgin birth. True, many of their older prophets and heroes were called "sons of God," but this sonship only implied an endowment of divine power, and never *excluded natural* generation. The word "virgin" as it is commonly used in the Old Testament does not mean more than "maiden," and our idea of virginity is not involved in its usage. It is furthermore noticeable that the Judaizing party of the early church rejected the idea of Jesus' virgin birth and the Ebionites and Gnostics mutilated all manuscripts and versions that referred to it. In the face of these facts we can agree with Dahlman, that such a Jewish fancy or influence would not override the sincerity of the writers of the Nativity chapters.

C. *The Heathen Influence Theory.* A

third theory attacks the story of the virgin birth upon the ground that it is due to "heathen influence." Chief among this group are Schmiedel and Soltau. They tell us that Hellenic thought and tradition, heathen theophanies and legends had penetrated Jewish life to a remarkable degree. In an especial manner, they say, this complex cultus and lore had come upon the Essene branch of the Jews wherein Jesus was born, and from whom his biography came. It is true that many stories of incarnations and semidivinities were current, and that they had heavy impact in the first days of the Christian era. But good scholarship questions whether the sheltered and secluded sect in Galilee shared to much extent in this fusion of ideas which characterized the outside world. It has been felt that the theory of the heathen influence upon the Essene group has been too much strained to gain a point.

Although marvelous birth stories were current in the heathen cults concerning their divinities, yet they had begun to lose

their prestige with the common people and paled into fables. Before the Christian era such heathen deities were being put upon the stage to be laughed at and upon the rack to be mocked. Furthermore, we do not believe that the early Christians would incorporate such a "divine birth" item into their own creed unless it was an immediate fact to the life of their Lord. They who died rather than make a scant and formal sacrifice to the emperor's god would scarcely permit such a heathen item falsely to taint the Christ in whom they believed. Harnack and Lobstein are hearty in the condemnation of this theory of "heathen influence" accounting for the rise of the story of Jesus' unique birth.

No direct analogy to Jesus' supernatural conception can be cited out of all the vast lore and legends which the opposition produces as evidence for their claims. After a thorough boiling down and straining-out process not a single analogy to Jesus' birth can they find.[1] Sweet dis-

[1] *The Birth and Infancy of Our Lord.* Reprinted by permission of the Westminster Press.

covers that these distinctions are quite marked between the heathen wonder births and that claimed for Jesus: (a) Jesus' birth was in order to incarnation. (b) Jesus' virgin birth combines a miraculous birth with a pure monotheism; the heathen myths do not. (c) Jesus' mother at the time of Jesus' conception, was a virgin, and remained so until after Jesus' birth.

While the heathen birth stories may approximate the claim for Jesus' birth, they do not detract from the claim, nor did they cause it to be made. However, they may indirectly bear a witness toward the credibility of it. The heathen myths of wonder births reflect a deep and universal expectancy of an incarnation and revelation on the part of God. We feel that God has answered this universal desire in the person of Jesus. Is it too much to suppose that in answering that universal expectation by sending Christ, God might have further considered the universal mode through which he was expected to come, and made Jesus' advent auspicious by the supernatural birth?

This is not asserting that we must think that God must have done this because the whole world, after certain manners, expected it, but it is saying that the divine regard for the particular thought of the human race might actuate God to give his supreme Gift in a manner in which his children more or less expected it.

The vast gulf which separates the heathen wonder births from that of Jesus' virgin birth is this—the heathen miracle births never produced a Christ. If we compare the man-gods with the life of Christ, what a gulf yawns between them! The claims of the heathen narratives are undermined by the wretched and sinful lives of those for whom divinity in birth is asserted. The virgin life of Jesus gives a sense of balance to the story of his virgin birth.

VII

THE SECONDARY WITNESSES

THE secondary witnesses to any recorded event are ever to be regarded, for no event of any significance can well live to itself so as not to touch upon kindred events or conditions directly or indirectly related to the event in question. It is especially true with the witness for the historical credibility of the virgin birth. We have shown that the testimony of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke is worthy of trust in the related data which they declare concerning Jesus' birth. We have also surveyed the various theories that seek to discredit the facts of these authors' assertion by ascribing them to fancies due to extraneous influences. The survey showed that all of these critics generally quarreled among themselves and disagreed with the New Testament statement of facts. It is now pertinent to

inquire if there be any other witnesses to this item of Jesus' life.

A. The first secondary witness to the credibility of the virgin birth of Christ is discovered in the Christian Church itself. The early church believed this article, as the polemics of Celsus, and the Ebionitic and Gnostic attitudes against the item suggest. The subapostolic age was rich in traditions that for the most part were reliable. Even Harnack admits that belief in this item was firmly established by the first half of the second century.

B. Another secondary witness to the belief in the item is found in the Apostles' Creed or "Rule of Faith." The exact date of this creed varies, Kattenbusch placing it as early as 100 A. D., while Harnack dates it at 140 A. D. In either case it was early, and the general creed of the early church. Of course we know that this rule of faith was primarily a summary of the things that the apostles were supposed to have believed and taught. It was possibly more a mutual testimony of belief than an implied test of faith for the early

Christians. The references to Jesus are primarily inserted and worded to offset the Gnostic tendencies of the day. Most of the symbols insist strongly upon the *human* side of Jesus for that reason. Critics tell us that the item of Jesus' birth is thus referred to only in order to declare for his bodily existence, and not to emphasize the supernatural conception. We can grant that the Gnostic prejudice was guarded by the creed in reference to Jesus' bodily existence, but the article asserts that "he was conceived by the Holy Ghost," and this implies something more than human entity and natural conception. Thus the general statement of faith of the subapostolic church testifies to the Gospel witnesses for the virgin birth.

C. The last witnesses of a secondary character are the evidences to be found in the writings of the early church apologists. Chief among these stands Ignatius, who flourished about 110 A. D. He emphasizes the virgin birth directly. The apologist, Aristides (125 A. D.) declares for the virgin birth also. Justyn Martyr,

Tertullian, and Origen affirm this item to be common to the faith of the church, and they do not oppose it.

Lobstein, with others, admits the weight of apostolic and subapostolic writings to favor the belief that the early Christians had in the virgin birth, but he dismisses the thought that we are to accept the article as a fact for faith to-day. He insinuates that the age in which these writers lived was one where the atmosphere was of mere assumption of facts rather than an investigation of them. The early Fathers are represented as readily accepting the Nativity records of Matthew and Luke as trustworthy, and based all of their own faith and apology merely upon these sources which they did not question.

Concerning this stricture, we can say that we believe we possess as ample grounds for the acceptance of the Nativity chapters to-day as did the early Church Fathers in their day. We do not feel that the integrity of the chapters can be impeached upon any grounds that the opposition has heretofore presented. The

early writers had the same criticisms preferred against the virgin birth that we have heard in our day. They had ready access to rich tradition and facts that lay outside the Gospel narratives, and oftttimes they went back of the Gospel records to prove the authority of certain passages which the Jewish bigots and heathen critics slandered.

The item of the virgin birth is found in Gospels whose integrity cannot be impeached. The stories are original with the whole of the Gospels in which they are found. They cannot be explained away as mere fancies born of extraneous "influences." The early church accepted the article. The "Rule of Faith" as a general summary of the belief of the early Christians shows that the item was accepted. The earliest apologists of the church believed in the article, in spite of the fact that it was criticized in their day, even as it has been in later days. They surely were led to make some investigations of data that lay back of the Gospel records in order to answer the critics of the virgin birth, as well as to have sure

grounds for their own faith in it. In the light of all the argument that is brought to bear upon the question it seems that the virgin birth as a scriptural claim has the right to be believed in from the standpoint of historical credibility. It is agreeable to the standard of Christian thinking and presents reliable witness for its historical truth.

VIII

THE WORTH OF THE ITEM TO THE CHURCH

THE worth of this particular article of the creed to the Christian Church can be more properly estimated when we consider just what worth to the church might imply. Our consideration for the church must, in the first place, relate to something more than the mere radical aspect of its thinking and have regard for that overwhelming majority of its members whose faith is not given to rationalistic tendencies. The Church of Christ primarily embraces the common mind, the common heart, and the common purpose of *believers* everywhere and at all times. If the church body consisted only of its minor theological group, we would see naught but creedal confusion and contention; if the Christian body waited to be moved by negative criticisms, it would possess but little power, and make

less progress in the fulfillment of its divine mission. Laying aside formal definitions of the Christian Church, we can practically say that it is that body of believers who are seeking, both for themselves and others, the form and power of godliness given through Jesus Christ as his person and spirit are revealed in the New Testament.

This practical conception of the church will prompt in its ministers a sympathetic attitude toward these peculiar features which the Christian body commonly credits to Jesus. Especially ought this caution to prevail when there is marked difference between one's personal views of Jesus and those which the church generally holds. This exhortation does not insinuate that one should compromise with his convictions in these matters, nor imply a cowardly reticence under all circumstances. It does suggest, however, that sober judgment should guard against the reflection of these critical opinions which are ever injurious to the faith of many and seldom constructive to that of others.

The mooted question of "the Christ of faith" being related to "the Jesus of history" illustrates the point in mind. The early German rationalists labored arduously to maintain that this relation was not vital, and their subsequent apologists still attempt to support this position. However, the bulk of Christian scholarship does not incline to this conception, and stoutly contends that there would have been no "Christ of faith" had there been no "Jesus of history"; the two are but one and inseparable. Psychology declares the Christian faith to be a force so vital that its creation and perpetuation demand something more for an explanation than the mere "idealization" of a Jesus whose life was void of manifest supernaturalism. The history of the Christian religion seems to support the same view. The New Testament plainly indicates that the faith of the immediate disciples was begotten by an appreciation of the unique elements of Jesus' character. From that day of earliest believers until now the portion of the church which has favorably modified the history of

civilization with an ardent evangelism and social reform has likewise identified the source of its compelling faith with the Jesus of the Gospel records.

One may hold the view that the Jesus of history can be dismissed on the ground that he has no significance for the Christ of faith and be within his theological right. The sincerity of such persons is not questioned, and with them there is no quarrel. But let it be remembered that this esoteric view is but a personal opinion to which the common body of the church has not attained. The position has certain philosophical implications which the Christian body evidently does not understand nor cares to receive. The theory is hostile to the major characteristics of our Lord, and frequently leads to indiscriminate pronouncements upon them. These utterances, which are oftttimes needless, cannot but wound the faith of those devout Christians who seriously feel that no man can lightly put asunder any of those unique features which God has seemingly joined together in the person of Jesus.

Some opponents of the virgin birth make a partial concession to this feeling of the church by intimating that any and all of the miraculous claims for Jesus possess a value which is independent of their historical fact. The argument is that faith in these items as "ideas" will contribute just as much to the Christian religion as to exercise faith in them as facts. With this interpretation of worth, some critics remind us that the idea of the virgin birth of Jesus has certain value, although it is not to be accepted as an actual transaction. They insinuate that the Nativity chapters have a symbolical significance; they add a charm of tender beauty to the birth of Jesus and accord a glory to childhood. The story is effective in that it casts a peculiar joy and gladness over the minds of people at each succeeding Christmastide. Thus the item is credited with a sort of imaginative value.

We can scarcely assent that a faith in "ideas" that are false to fact is a sufficient basis for the real Christian joy and service. Psychology and history both

deny that such could be. If the "idea" of the virgin birth of Jesus does contribute anything of joy to the world, we cannot but feel that a faith in the fact of it would supremely modify that gladness by giving it a deeper assurance. If we are to admit that this item has any value to the church which accepts it, the larger worth of the miracle is to be discerned in the terms of credited historical fact.

All scholars opposed to the supernatural conception do not admit that this article of creed has any value for the Christian body. To the contrary, many of them assert that the alleged miracle is a positive handicap to the prestige of the church and its evangelical mission. A most frank and forceful summary of this position is expressed by R. J. Campbell in his *New Theology*: "Like many others, I used to take the position that acceptance or nonacceptance of the doctrine of the virgin birth was immaterial because Christianity was quite independent of it; but later reflection has convinced me that in point of fact it oper-

ates as a hindrance to spiritual religion and a real living faith in Jesus."[1]

Thinkers of this type allude to the baleful influence which this traditional article of faith has begotten in the Mariolatry cultus with all of its related superstition and repugnant practices. They claim that the retention of the item in the Christian creed lowers the family conception. It flaunts into the faces of would-be converts a miracle which insults their intelligence, and thereby prevents them from entering into the membership of the church.

In reply to these serious charges it can be said that the fact of and faith in the miraculous origin of Jesus does not, of itself, cause the extreme views of Mariolatry, virginity, or celibacy any more than the self-denial of Jesus caused the harsh asceticism of Montanus or Simon Stylites. All of these abnormal tendencies are the result of warped interpretations of facts incident to the life of Jesus, and are not directly chargeable to them.

We can also question the assertion that

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many earnest persons are shut out of membership in the Christian Church because they might be required to express their belief in the virgin birth of its Founder. Practically no Christian bodies impose this article as a dogmatic shibboleth for membership in their several communions. Even if the evangelical branches of the church did expressly stress this doctrinal requirement for entrance in their several fellowships, the liberal denominations have doors open especially to welcome all who doubt or deny the particular or general divine characteristics of Jesus. Surely that alleged multitude of earnest people who are supposed to be churchless because the virgin birth is a portion of the creed would find their way into those Christian folds where nothing of the sort is required. But the fact that the membership in the liberal communions remains static indicates that but few persons remain out of the church because of this creedal implication.

Any reference to that questionable number who are kept out of the church

at large because of its acceptance of the supernatural birth of Jesus causes us to reflect upon the various degrees of worth which this article might have for the great number who have entered the church and who constitute its membership. For many the miracle magnifies the divine power of Jesus. For them all accredited miracles which move in a moral direction seem to afford an essential and harmonized revelation of the transcendent and immanent nature of God—a revelation without which no religion is vigorous or vital. The Christian body feels that this imperative revelation centers supremely in Jesus, and for them, therefore, all miracles that relate to his person and conduct reinforce the general conception that in him and through him are these essential attributes of the Divine. The fact of the virgin birth strengthens this conviction. Directly as an act, the miracle attests the Divine power and purpose over and through the natural order; indirectly the miracle presents a Lord whose incomparable life and marvelous resurrection are likewise balanced by a signal birth.

The attitude taken toward the validity of this item also relates to the credited authority of the New Testament Scriptures and to this degree it has certain meaning for the church. It is evident that the early church found its foundations for faith and practice in the New Testament, and recognized it as authoritative for both. A continuous and wholesome regard for these accepted Scriptures has ever crowned the church with whatever measures of purity and power she may have possessed. It is certain that the future of the Christian Church will pivot primarily upon what the Christian body continues to believe in this matter, for character and conduct are inseparable from creed.

These implications of scriptural authority for the welfare of the church suggest that the high estimate of scriptural integrity should never be weakened in the thinking of Christian people. This essential conviction will not be deepened by the negative pronouncements upon the birth of Jesus. The critic may purpose to proceed no further than to deny this one

item and impugn the trustworthiness of the Scriptures that declare it; but this single criticism will have a double reaction upon the minds of many Christian people should they receive it. When the feeling generally obtains that one accepted scriptural claim for the uniqueness of Jesus can be disposed of, then the validity of all claims and Scriptures can be looked upon askance. If the sense of scriptural authority by any means is caused to degenerate into a mere elective policy, the tendency will be progressive and perilous. With little discrimination it will be assumed that if the credited portions of Scripture relative to creed can be annulled at personal pleasure, then a similar attitude can be taken toward the portions authoritative for conduct should the occasion arise.

It must be confessed that the doctrinal importance of the virgin birth of Jesus means much or little to the mind of the Christian Church. Without doubt a vast number of Christian persons unconsciously attach a doctrinal worth to the item. For these persons the supernatu-

ral conception makes provision for the sinlessness of Jesus, and the miracle also affords a sort of an intellectual rest and partial insight into God's choice of mode in effecting the incarnation of Jesus. It is felt that the outstanding facts of the virgin birth, the incarnation and implied perfection are so related to Jesus' person that these facts must have some vital significance for each other. It is certain that this view is more traditional than scriptural, for it cannot be definitely defended or denied by an appeal to scriptural authority. Nevertheless, the doctrinal conviction of the virgin birth is commonly held by many Christian people, and those who studiously maintain it contend that no expedient other than the miraculous conception of Jesus can well account for the principal doctrines which center in him.

We must yield to all such thinkers their theological right to their individual convictions in this matter. But these same scholars in turn must permit the same freedom of belief on this point to those others who differ with them. To impe-

rially assert that the cardinal doctrines of Jesus are absolutely grounded in his virgin birth, and that it is a breach of evangelical faith to doubt it is a dogmatism that nothing can be relied upon to prove.

Such a dogmatism has its apparent weaknesses. It strongly tends toward the implication that God is limited to one indispensable expedient in effecting the major distinctions of Jesus' character, and also presumes an infallible knowledge as to just when and where sin is operative in human nature. The contention inclines to the view that sin is somehow resident in the physical basis and is germinal through natural generation. But even those two groups in the church which hold this traditional conception concerning sin are not in accord with each other as to the place and procedure involved in securing the perfection of Jesus.

The conservative Protestant group of scholars hold that this sinlessness was immediately secured *in the direct act* of the miraculous conception. The Roman Catholic communion feels that it solves

the problem of Jesus' perfection by the improvision of the immaculate conception of Mary. It is evident that this subterfuge provides occasion for the sinlessness of Jesus even *before his own* conception.

There are other thinkers within the Christian body who hold a different view as to the fact and force of sin in human nature. This position indicates that the possibility of sin is only germinal to moral consciousness through which it dominates the physical life. Upon this premise it is contended that all sin in Jesus was primarily canceled by the investment of the divine power within him. This investment of divine power could reasonably have originated in the moral nature of Jesus' person; it could have been *post-conceptional,* and was not necessarily conditioned by or upon the physical miracle of his birth.

A casual analysis of each of these theories will reveal that they differ on the points of ethical psychology, and thereby vary in their conclusions as to time and place where the perfection of Jesus was

secured. However, all of them are equally agreed in the fact which is fundamental, namely, that the perfect sinlessness of Jesus was essentially conditioned by the *power* of his divine incarnation. The manner and moment of this transaction are of such minor importance and debatable assumption that no particular dogmatism can be well supported.

The dogmatic contention for the doctrinal importance of the virgin birth cannot be sustained upon historical grounds. It is true that the Church Fathers contended for the doctrinal worth of this item as well as for its historical validity. But it is also apparent that the Patristic conclusion on this point of Christology, like many others, was deduced by certain theological presuppositions which do not uniformly nor universally obtain in Christian thinking of to-day. Any appeal to history in this regard must be thoroughgoing and must go back to the immediate disciples of Jesus and their records of teaching. The appeal to these original and authoritative sources for faith most surely declares that the virgin birth of

Jesus was made no tenet for evangelical belief or preaching. To what extent a knowledge of Jesus' birth was common to the apostles, and to what degree they personally attached a doctrinal import to it are matters for speculation. Their writings declare for the virgin birth and the incarnation of Jesus; but nowhere is there an intimation that either fact conditioned the other.

No dogmatic importance of the miraculous birth of Jesus can be conclusively drawn by an exegetical procedure. We must bear in mind that beyond the Nativity chapters there is no reference to the virgin birth in all of the New Testament. Even the most conservative scholars make this admission, and present reasonable apologies for this marked silence. If this body of the Scriptures contains no single allusion to the item which is deemed forceful enough to constitute a mere statement of fact for it, it is evident that they contain nothing compelling for its doctrinal proof.

This very silence on the doctrine of Jesus' birth in the major portion of the

New Testament, and especially in the Epistles, strengthens the statement of the *fact* for it in the Nativity records. The silence would indicate that Matthew and Luke did not incorporate the story of the virgin birth in their respective Gospels merely to accommodate a doctrinal purpose. This inference would of itself suggest that we proceed cautiously in forcing any dogmatic interpretations from the Nativity scriptures. If the fact of Jesus' unique birth had a direct bearing upon the incarnation and sinlessness of his person, we feel sure that Matthew and Luke, who are responsible for the Nativity records and devote two chapters each of their Gospels to it, would have certainly attached some doctrinal importance to the act if they felt that it possessed any. But they say nothing which is convincing on this point.

The attempt is sometimes made to show that Matthew and Luke do offer data in their birth chapters which supports a doctrinal deduction. The passages most frequently quoted in this connection read as follows—Matt. 1. 20-21: "Joseph, thou

son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins." Luke 1. 35: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." These words can be soberly construed as declarations for Jesus' unique birth and prophetic utterances concerning the nature of his person and the titles to be ascribed to him. They in no wise declare that these divine attributes are to be posited by the miracle of the birth.

This conception is fairly reinforced when we consider the approximate language which Luke (1. 15) employs in describing the annunciation to Zacharias relative to John. John's birth involved the renewal of the reproductive processes of his parents, and to that extent was miraculous. John is filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb; he

shall be called a certain name and is ordained to a certain office. It is not claimed that the birth or character of John is analogous to that of Jesus, and none have ever contended that John's peculiar character was due to the direct act of his conception. But the similarity of Luke's expressions in both of these instances would indicate that the sinlessness and incarnation of Jesus did not rest primarily upon the physical miracle of his birth. The texts in both cases are prophetic of future ascriptions rather than the predications of their causes.

It is, therefore, upon the force of tradition that the church of to-day invests the miracle of Jesus' birth with direct meaning for the major features of his experience. This doctrinal significance rests fundamentally upon a personal assumption which is the privilege of each believer. But a dogmatism in this one direction cannot rely upon history nor Scripture to enforce its claim; much less does the doctrinal acceptance of this item constitute a valid test for evangelical faith.

If the inquiry is raised as to what value this miracle has if it does not necessarily involve a doctrinal aspect, it can be said that the miraculous birth might have a direct worth independent of doctrinal implications. In all of our discussion of this item we have viewed the whole matter in the light of what it might or might not mean to us for doctrine. We seldom reflect upon the thought that this miracle could have been of tremendous import to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and through her react upon the physical nature of the child which she, as the most favored of women, should bear.

We must bear in mind that the Jewish race and religion ever sought signs for the confirmation of Divine promise. For that matter all men exercise religious faith and trust upon some conditional evidences, although the prescribed tests might vary. If this tendency is native to us in the trusts of our common ways, to what extent would not the Jewish Joseph and Mary be exercised by the divine promise that the one Mary should mother would be the Son of God? To believe that

promise which related them to the *supreme event* of the world would almost of itself demand some supreme attestation. We do know that Joseph, in his disturbed mind, needed some assurance relative to the unique character of the Son that his espoused wife should bear (Matt. 1. 18, 19). Likewise Mary was not persuaded, even by the annunciation, that she could possibly be the highest favored among women (Luke 1. 34, 35). We feel that some outstanding sign would be of essential worth to these who were to be so closely related to the life of the incomparable Son.

It is not too much to think that the supernatural conception served this purpose. We know that this was an indisputable evidence to Mary (Luke 1. 49) concerning the extraordinary nature of her child. From the birth of Jesus, and throughout all of his life, she seemed to sense his unique nature far beyond all others (Luke 2. 19; John 2. 3, 5; Luke 2. 51). It would seem that the mother of Jesus had no more evidence than others whereby to interpret these peculiar

powers of her Son unless the witness was immediate to her knowledge of the miracle attached to his birth. Likewise, it may have been the consciousness of this wondrous event which saved her from despair at the cross (John 19. 25, 26), and led her, although a devout Jewess (Luke 2. 22 and 39, 41), into the earliest group that expected to be so baptized with his spirit that they should be witnesses for him (Acts 1. 14).

The physical miracle of the conception of Jesus would not only be an immediate attestation to Mary concerning the remarkable promise of the Son, but such an assurance would guard against the prejudices and indiscreet approaches of Joseph (Matt. 1. 24, 25). The high and holy confidence which was caused by the miracle upon Mary and reflected in "The Magnificat" (Luke 1. 46, 55) could not do otherwise than exercise a profound reaction upon the child during the prenatal days. Such positive influences would produce the highest physical basis for the Christ-child, which is equally as essential to real incarnation as the per-

fection of the divine power that was to come upon him.

It is thus possible to look upon the virgin birth as a single and direct act of the Holy Spirit whereby a miracle was wrought *upon Mary,* the result of which was the human child Jesus. This is in accord with the chapters that tell us all that we do know about the matter in this regard. Both Matthew and Luke make the miracle amount to no more than a witness, that an extraordinary child should be born who should be called the Son of the Most High. Each author closes his Nativity record with the story of the birth of the Child destined to be wonderful and to show forth the salvation of God. Nothing in either record pictures the child as extraordinary, except from the standpoint of the manner of his birth, and the exalted mission that he was to fulfill. The intimation of these writers is that power to further degrees is to come upon the child, and the references in Luke 2. 40 and 2. 52 would indicate that the mysteries of the incarnation would be culminating in their process,

and probably proceed with the unfolding of the human powers in postnatal days.

This is no dogmatism, but it is an assumption that seems to accord with the very *texts* incorporated with the Nativity chapters themselves and the remaining chapters of Matthew and Luke. The flight to Egypt, a silence as to any miracles of Jesus in childhood, the obedience in the home, the apparent indifference on the part of Jesus' brethren toward him—all of these allusions combine to indicate that the incarnation of Jesus was a progressive feature of his experience. If we say that his incarnation was complete and final in the conception, we are compelled to admit that the peculiar manifestations of it were modified by the passing of his years. Neither of these views of the incarnation would detract from the fact of its fullness; whether it be an instantaneous or a progressive process, it could reach completeness.

If we care to take the ground that the incarnation of Jesus as such was a progressive feature of his experience, we can account for the more or less normal rela-

tions of his childhood life, and the silence concerning it that is marked until he is some twelve years of age. The fact that the divine power was culminating from birth will explain those progressive manifestations of unique power and self-consciousness that characterize the events of Jesus' career. The precocity revealed at the Temple, the miracle at Cana, the Messianic consciousness at the baptism, the subsequent mighty works of his later ministry—all of these features would suggest that the incarnation of Jesus was a progressive experience that culminated in the resurrection, and continued to reveal itself in the further manifestations of his Spirit.

Sober and thoughtful scholarship affirms that the church may well credit the virgin birth of Jesus. The scriptures which declare for the item are trustworthy for faith. As a miracle the act had vital significance for Mary. The miracle also corresponds quite favorably with that uniqueness which characterized the life of Jesus as a whole. Belief in this feature of our Lord's origin can only be

reasonably accounted for by the occurrence of the fact of it, and to the Christian body which more generally accepts the miracle it has special degrees of worth. It cannot be said that to doubt the item necessarily cancels an evangelical faith in the major distinction of Jesus' person. The doctrinal significance of the miracle of Jesus' birth rests primarily upon the personal prepossessions, and without doubt the larger portion of the church continues to hold the traditional view in this regard.

The devout Christian can reverently stand with the worshiping congregation and repeat without mental reservation the creed of the past and present—"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord; who was born of the Virgin Mary." And with unfeigned faith we can unite in singing at each passing Christmastide the chant that is old yet ever new:

"Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ,
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.

When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man,
Thou didst humble thyself to be born of a Virgin.
When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death,
Thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.
Thou sittest at the right hand of God, in the glory of God, the Father.
We believe that thou shalt come to be our Judge.
We therefore pray thee, help thy servants,
Whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.
Make them to be numbered with thy saints in glory Everlasting. Amen."

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